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House Committee on International Relations,
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere

House Committee on the Judiciary's,
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security

**"The need for European Assistance to Colombia
for the fight against illicit drugs"**

Honorable Representative Dan Burton, Honorable Representative Howard Coble, Honorable Representatives, Members of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Members of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security.

I seize this opportunity to express my gratitude for the great support that the Congress and the Government of the United States have given Colombia and its Government to neutralize drug-trafficking in my country, and specially for the support rendered to the National Police of Colombia, which today counts upon the best aerial equipment and operational resources, which is in great part due to your assistance.

Is of general knowledge the results achieved by the Democratic Security Program of President Alvaro Uribe, who has as a priority the fight against illicit drugs. Drug trafficking is a factor that destabilizes and threatens our democratic institutions and fuels terrorism.

We, as Permanent Representatives at the United Nations in Vienna, are asking the International community's support and especially the European countries help to fight this scourge. The fight against drug trafficking needs the international solidarity expressed in cooperation and assistance.

Mr. Chairman:

In my 40 years of service with the National Police of Colombia, where I had the honor to occupy, among others, the position as Head of Antinarcotics, as also as Director General, I have witnessed first hand the ill-fated evolution of the global problem of illicit drugs. Now, as Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Vienna, I have come to grasp the global panorama of this scourge from another, and clearer, perspective.

It is undeniable that progress has been made – the international community is beginning to understand that this phenomenon is by nature transnational and that it is consequently necessary to confront it in a joint, supportive and committed manner. The times where countries pointed at each other have past and we are now in the era of “shared responsibility”.

Nevertheless, given the different perceptions that countries have of Colombian reality and maybe because this lack of knowledge, the levels of commitment and support in the battle that liberates our country, in the common interest of eradicating drug-trafficking, are not the same.

There is no need for me to illustrate to the Honorable Congress the incalculable costs that Colombia has had to take on in this battle in terms of resources and human lives; I believe you are fully aware of these. The harmful influence that drug-trafficking has had on my country leads me to affirm that Colombian history can be divided into two: before and after the appearance of this cancer called drugs.

Transnational drug-trafficking is an ever changing phenomenon; drug-traffickers are constantly modifying their operations in order to mock the authorities, who do not always have the necessary capacity to adapt or react. These delinquents live in a permanent search of the line of least resistance in order to introduce their drug to those markets where control is most weak. This is what we see in the case of cocaine in Europe and other regions.

The statistics contained in the 2006 World Drug Report, published by the United Nations, clearly shows a tendency towards consumption increase of cocaine in Europe, Spain and the United Kingdom being the most affected. In the United Kingdom, the annual prevalence went from 0,3% in 1992 to 2,4% in 2004.

During his recent visit to Colombia on September 14, Foreign Office Minister and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State of the United Kingdom, Lord Triesman, stated that "consumption of cocaine in Europe has skyrocketed, which is why it is urgent to work together with the producing countries in order to thwart the actions of the drug cartels."

He also stated that they are "working towards catching drug traffickers and detaining the immense quantity of money and, without a doubt, there being so much money involved, the battle is very difficult, but we are committed."

It is particularly dramatic in the case of Spain, whose annual prevalence of cocaine use among its population between 15 and 64 years of age, increased from 1,6% in 1997 to 2,7 % in 2003, which means that Spain has become a great consumer of cocaine, as other countries of the Union.

A few days past, the Director of the National Drug Plan of Spain, Ms. Carmen Moya, assured that "the drug consumer is less conscious each time of the risk that the use of these substances represents for his/her health".

The same tendency appears in Germany, moving from 0,2% in 1990 to 1% in 2003. These statistics are based on Government surveys and on the demand for treatment at specialised centres.

Recently, press reports have circulated that make reference to studies carried out to measure the presence of the metabolite Benzoyllecgonina, a metabolic derivative of cocaine consumption, in the rivers Po in Italy, Rhine in Germany, and the Thames in England, into which flow the residual waters of the cities. Scientists identified the presence of this metabolite in such concentrations as to suggest that the cocaine consumption in the valleys of these important river ports is greater than the official estimates.

Investigators of the Nuremberg Institute for Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Investigation carried out tests in the river Rhine that indicated an annual consumption of 11 tons of pure cocaine by the 38,5 million persons whose residual waters flow into the river in Düsseldorf. The official German statistics, based on surveys, demand for treatment in specialised centres, and police investigation, estimate that 0,8% of the population between 18 and 59 years, which represents some 400.000 people, consume cocaine at least once a year. If the results of the Rhine study are correct, this number would be a serious underestimation of the problem.

A similar study was carried out by scientists of the Mario Negri Institute of Milan for Pharmaceutical Investigations, who took water samples from the Thames River. The results suggest that at different points in the river, cocaine consumption could be between 8 and 15 times above the official estimates.

London would therefore be consuming 37.638 daily cocaine doses, which is in stark contrast to the official statistics taken from the British Crime Survey of 2003/2004 which estimates some 344.000 per month, representing around 2.397 doses of 100 mg daily.

In the valley of the River Po, where five million people live, scientists of the Mario Negri Institute calculated an annual consumption of 1.500 kilos, which equates to 40.000 doses daily, a number higher than the 15.000 doses per month established by the official statistics.

These results allow for the supposition that the statistics that are officially administered concerning cocaine consumption in the main European cities are a pale reflection of the worrying reality.

In its 2005 Report, the International Narcotics Control Board – INCB - indicated: *“The total volume of seized cocaine in Europe continues to grow, which might indicate that the illegal use of this substance is widespread. Increase in the demand for treatment of cocaine addiction in Western Europe also indicates this situation.”*

Just to illustrate about the dimension of drug consumption in Europe, allow myself to make reference to the newspaper Die Presse, which informs in its September 8th edition, that in this summer alone, six people died in the Spanish island of Ibiza as consequence of drug abuse.

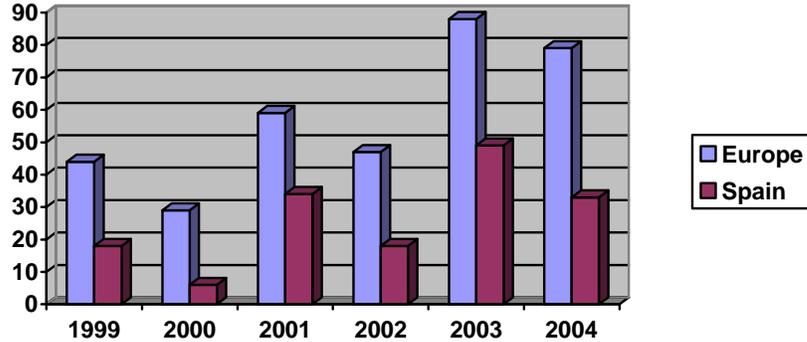
Even more worrying is the rise of crack-cocaine consumption in Europe. In the past years, seven European countries reported an increase in crack-cocaine consumption, other seven reported little change, and only two a decrease. Consumption of this substance is restricted to a few areas in Europe, but the risk for its expansion over the continent exists.

INCREASE OF COCAINE TRAFFICKING IN EUROPE

The greater part of cocaine destined for Europe enters via Spain or the Netherlands, although in recent years its entry via other countries with less important ports has increased. Recent seizures of large volumes of cocaine in Portugal allow inferring the increase of trafficking via that country – in November 2005, six tons of cocaine were seized in an area near Lisbon, in February 2006, in Algarve, 8 tons of cocaine were seized, which constitutes the second largest seizure of this drug in Europe in the present decade. The flow of cocaine via Portugal has increased during 2006 and it is nearing 30 tons, and if this tendency continues, Portugal will surpass Spain as main entry port for cocaine in the European Union.

Spain is a thermometer that allows measurement of the tendencies in the rest of Europe: it is the principal entry port of cocaine on the continent, the greatest part of cocaine seizures in Europe occur in this country and it is the third country worldwide in drug seizures. The largest cocaine seizure in Europe occurred in the Canary Islands in July 1999, when 10 tons of cocaine was seized.

Cocaine Seizures in Spain and European total (Metric Tons)



	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
EUROPE	44	29	59	47	88	79
SPAIN	18	6	34	18	49	33

Source: World Drug Report 2006-ONUDD

It has to be taken into consideration that due to the high level of integration in the European countries and the inexistence of border control between the States, once that drugs enter the European Union, they can circulate with relative ease.

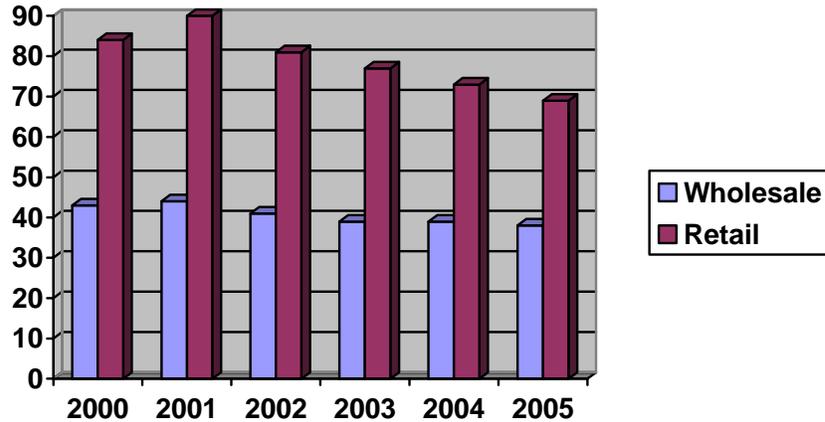
Seizures are indicators that allow evaluating up until what point illegal trafficking of a specific substance has increased. A greater amount of seizures show the efficiency of the authorities, but at the same time indicates a greater disposition of the drug in a specific geographic region and at the same time greater consumption. It is estimated that the authorities are able to seize only 20% of the produced cocaine.

In view of the improvement of authority control, drug traffickers have developed new routes. An increase of trafficking via African countries has been evidenced, as also the creation of alliances between mafias and the use of traditional routes of other drugs such as cannabis, hashish, and heroine.

This new phenomenon is of great worry for authorities since drug traffickers would operate from secure ports in Africa with little law enforcement infrastructure and prone to institutional corruption, to which the aggravating circumstance is added that some of these countries are particularly open to fundamentalism, where international terrorist organisations can operate.

Cocaine prices in Europe are also an important indicator of drug availability. According to the *World Drug Report 2006*, a tendency towards the reduction of cocaine prices has been shown, as much in wholesale as in street price.

Retail and Wholesale Cocaine Prices in Western Europe (Gram. in euros)



	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Wholesale price (€)	43	44	41	39	39	38
Retail price (€)	84	90	81	77	73	69

Source: World Drug Report 2006 -ONUDD

CONCLUSIONS

What used to be a fear is today reality. Cocaine consumption grows at an accelerated pace in Europe, as evidenced by serious and credible studies such as the World Drug Report and the Annual INCB Report. The aforesaid allows us to establish a series of conclusions:

- It is important to caution the European Union of this serious problem, which has not been dimensioned in its true magnitude.
- If these countries do not take the necessary corrective measures the costs they will have to assume in social costs, and in terms of public health, will be incalculable.
- It is necessary to make Europe aware of the high cost that Colombia pays in trying to avoid that illicit drugs reach their markets.
- This effort must be compensated by a true will for demand reduction.
- The European Union should, in the framework of shared responsibility, increase its support and renew its commitment towards the battle of our country against illicit drugs.
- Drug trafficking is intimately related to terrorism and it is important to understand this relationship and strike at this inexhaustible fountain of resources for terrorist groups.

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